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RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUCNNAR/VIENNA NARCOTICS COLLECTIVE IMMEDIATE
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD IMMEDIATE 0262
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL IMMEDIATE 0294
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 UNVIE VIENNA 000258

SIPDIS

SAGSWA FOR ROSS AND DEHGAN, NEA/IR FOR SCHWARTZ, INL FOR WILLIAMS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/05/2023

TAGS: [PREL](#) [SNAR](#) [AF](#) [IR](#) [PAK](#)

SUBJECT: UNODC HEAD NOTES CHANGE IN IRAN,S TONE TOWARD U.S.

REF: A. UNVIE VIENNA 00173

[1](#)B. UNVIE VIENNA 00226

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Classified By: Ambassador Gregory L. Schulte for reasons 1.4 (c) and (e)
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[1](#)1. (U) This is an action request. Please see para 9.

Summary

[1](#)2. (S) UNODC Executive Director Antonio Costa on May 27 debriefed Ambassador Schulte on his trip the previous week to Iran to take part in a ceremony commemorating the completion of Iran,s physical border protection measures. Costa also met with high-level Iranian officials and reported that there was a clear change in their tone, especially from Foreign Minister Motaki. Motaki and others had dropped "structured" rhetoric that criticized the U.S. and UN. Instead, he noted that Iran has some common points of interest with the Obama administration on counternarcotics issues and Afghanistan, though there are still "some contradictory signals." Costa also argued that the Triangular Initiative, itself, is a message to the U.S. and the West to show that Iran can contribute positively to the region. End Summary.

Iranian Officials Positive in Tone, Note Overlap of Interests with U.S.

[1](#)3. (C) UNODC Executive Director Antonio Costa and his incoming Chief of Staff, Roberto Arbitrio, on May 27 debriefed Ambassador Schulte on their trip the previous week to Iran to take part in a ceremony commemorating the completion of 1200 km-long physical border security upgrades. These include the installation of berms, trenches, and a wall to prevent unauthorized people--primarily smugglers and terrorists--from crossing into Iran from Afghanistan and Pakistan, an infrastructure project that Iranian officials claim cost them one billion dollars over three years. Costa noted that the occasion was also marked by week-long Iranian counternarcotics exercises which involved thousands of troops, including mechanized troops and paratroopers. UNODC staff were allowed to attend these exercises in full, and the Iranians organized a military parade for Costa as their guest of honor at the ceremony.

[1](#)4. (S) Costa and Arbitrio also took advantage of their

trip to Iran to meet with a number of high-level officials, including Foreign Minister Motaki, the Iranian Health Minister, Drug Control Headquarters Head Moghadam, and Anti-Narcotics Police Head Hossein-Abadi. Although Costa had also planned to meet with President Ahmadinejad, he was unable to because of the death of a prominent cleric in Qom. Arbitrio, who has met with Motaki on several occasions, said that there was a definite change in tone in this meeting, a departure from any meeting he has had in the last 5 years. In the past, he said, every meeting with an Iranian official has included "structured" rhetoric heavily laden with criticism of the U.S., UNAMA, and the UN. The UN is criticized for the imposition of sanctions, and UNODC has been criticized for "not doing enough" or getting enough money for Iran programs. In this meeting, there was no criticism whatsoever of the U.S. or UN, a clear change that was replicated in their other meetings with Iranian officials. Motaki even mentioned that Iran has some points of common interest with the Obama administration on counternarcotics issues and Afghanistan, but noted that there are still "some contradictory signals." He complimented the role of UNODC and Costa for creating a positive environment for discussing the Afghanistan issue and said, at one point, "I am at your service," which took both Arbitrio and Costa by surprise, since this is "unusual culturally for the Iranians" and they are usually antagonistic to foreigners. Also uncharacteristically, Iran did not request additional UNODC funds. (Note: This is consistent with Iran,s declarations at an earlier meeting, see Ref A. End Note.) Costa called this the "most promising meeting (he has) ever had with an Iranian official." Costa noted that the only message that did not fit this more positive tone was Moghadam,s statement during the military parade, but Costa and Arbitrio both cautioned that this statement was for the domestic audience.

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Even these "anti-Zionist" statements were not as hardline as previous similar statements, in Costa,s opinion.

15. (S) In response to a question from the Ambassador about what message he thought Motaki was trying to send, Costa shared his personal opinion--for which he admitted having no evidence--that when the U.S. became involved in Iraq, the involvement in Afghanistan was essentially a second front that kept the U.S. bogged down. Iran smuggled arms to Afghanistan and supported groups it did not like to try to complicate the situation for the U.S. However, Iran now sees an opportunity to get the U.S. out of the region, so it,s changing its policy and trying to contribute to stability. Iran needs and wants a strong and independent Afghanistan to meet its goals. Arbitrio agreed with Costa,s point that Iran is looking for ways to get the West out of the region, but added that the Triangular Initiative is also a way for Iran to get leverage that can be used for dialogue with a variety of players.

16. (C) Costa also noted that, in his view, Iran is serious about delivering on its participation in trilateral cooperation with Pakistan and Afghanistan. Iranian officials are trying to "sell" the Joint Planning Center they have established on their territory and are allowing encrypted messages and intelligence to be shared among the three countries. At the same time, Iran,s participation in counternarcotics cooperation is multi-disciplinary and Iran continues to upgrade the facilities and resources available for trilateral cooperation. Costa also noted that the three countries still plan to carry out the next joint counternarcotics operation under the Triangular Initiative in the next few weeks so that it takes place before the late June ministerial meeting. He argued that the Triangular Initiative, itself, is a political message to the U.S. and the West, presumably to show Iran,s willingness to be a positive actor in the region.

17. (C) Costa also gave a readout of his trip to Afghanistan the previous week consistent with the readout Arbitrio had given Msnoffs earlier (Ref B) and noted his appreciation for U.S. efforts to allow UNODC to be debriefed on NATO operations in Afghanistan. Costa noted that this will help UNODC improve its analysis of how NATO operations disrupt the narcotics market and the economy.

18. (C) Costa argued that UNODC,s mission is becoming higher-profile. The UN recently chaired a meeting on Iran and wanted to know what UNODC is doing and how well their efforts are working. In addition, Costa has been tasked by the Italians with providing them with some materials on counternarcotics cooperation and programs for discussion at the G-8 meeting in Trieste later this month. Antonino de Leo, the UNODC Paris Pact Coordinator who is in Tehran on TDY for about three months, reported that the meeting of the Iranian, Pakistani, and Afghan presidents involved heavy discussion of counternarcotics cooperation, including ways to upgrade the Triangular Initiative and facilitate intelligence sharing on the issue, though they did not mention the Initiative by name. UNODC is planning a mission to Pakistan in early June to see how it can develop a strategic plan for the country, including what can be done to aid Pakistan,s participation in the Triangular Initiative.

Action Request

19. (C) At the end of the meeting, Costa asked the Ambassador if the U.S. would object to a joint presentation by Iran (probably to be given by the DCHQ Deputy Head), Pakistan, and Afghanistan to the Major Donors Group meeting scheduled o/a July 2. (Note: The Major Donors will have their semi-annual meeting on July 1. End Note.) This would be an informal meeting organized by UNODC ahead of the formal Major Donors meeting. ACTION REQUEST: Mission requests guidance on whether we can formally support inclusion of Iran in such a meeting at which U.S. officials will be present. Mission recommends support for the Iranian briefing, especially given our attendance at the UNODC Iran program

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briefing in April (Ref A). Andrea Hall (43 1 31339 4736, HallAG@state.sgov.gov) is the Mission,s POC for this activity.
SCHULTE